

Southeast Fisheries Science Center
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MEMORANDUM FOR: SEFSC Staff
FROM: Nancy Thompson
SUBJECT: Promotion Policies

Recently there have been requests to clarify the Center's promotion policies, particularly as they relate to employees covered by the Demonstration Project Personnel System. This memorandum is an effort to describe the civil service regulations governing promotions and the policies adopted by the Center to implement them.

First, please note that people in temporary or term positions are not eligible for non-competitive promotions and cannot compete for permanent positions announced under Merit Promotion if they have never held a permanent position (i.e., have "status"). Individuals in temporary and term positions are hired for a specified period of time in a particular position at a defined grade level. The only way to reach a higher grade is to successfully compete for a different position advertised at a higher grade that is open to non-status applicants. Therefore, if a permanent position is open for the acceptance of applications from all U.S. Citizens, people in temporary or term positions could compete for and be hired at a higher grade, if they were eligible.

The most common way for status employees to obtain a higher grade in the Federal Government is through the Merit Promotion procedure. This involves competing for an advertised position at a higher grade for which one is eligible. This is a simple, straightforward promotion procedure and the individual selected for the position is considered the most capable of performing the duties of the vacancy when compared with other eligible candidates applying for the position. In addition to eligibility (i.e., time in grade, etc.) a personnel specialist must determine that the individual is qualified for the position (i.e., possess the necessary combination of experience and education).

Certain positions can be filled as Career Ladder positions. This means that a position is advertised and filled at a lower level, but that a higher grade level (considered the "full performance" level for that position) is identified in the vacancy announcement for potential promotion. The selected individual is expected to spend one to three years at the lower grade, and then, having completed the experience and training requirements, can be promoted non-competitively to the higher grade or grades. Career Ladder vacancy announcements generally contain a statement that the position has "known promotion potential" (knp). Questions about whether or not a particular position is career ladder can be addressed to your supervisor or Human Resources in Kansas City.

A less common type of promotion is called “Accretion of Duties”. This occurs when an individual starts out in a position with one set of assigned duties, but over time (and generally through unplanned actions resulting from changes in overall personnel and organizational responsibilities) takes on additional duties at a higher level, so that it becomes clear eventually that their performance is at a higher grade level. Unlike Merit Promotions or Career Ladder Promotions, in which the individual either competes for a higher level position or is judged to be ready to perform higher level duties, Accretion of Duties Promotions involves an individual who actually is working at the higher level before the promotion occurs. Accretion of Duties promotions are initiated by the supervisor, who needs to provide sufficient justification to support the proposed action, but they also are governed by specific regulatory requirements that are sometimes difficult to satisfy.

Finally, there are research grade promotions to GS-12 or above (GS-pay system) or ZP-IV or above (demonstration pay system). These promotions are modeled after those followed by academia, in that individuals are expected to achieve increasing levels of productivity and peer recognition as they progress through their careers. A Factor IV Committee exists within the Center, consisting of peers, not supervisors, to evaluate an individual’s scientific accomplishments. Factor IV may call on an outside expert or experts as appropriate. An individual considered for a research grade promotion prepares their resume for review by the Factor IV Committee, each member of which performs an independent assessment. This factor (qualifications and scientific contributions) is given a double weight in grade determination with the other three factors: job situation and responsibility, supervision received, and guidelines and originality. Upon completion, the Factor IV results are forwarded to the Center’s Personnel Management Advisory Committee (PMAC) to develop a final recommendation. The PMAC is the group overseeing promotion actions and policies for the Center, and its recommendations are forwarded to the Center Director (and Pay Pool Manager for Demo employees) for final decision. In cases other than promotions to the GS-15 (or ZP-V) level, documenting paperwork is then sent to the Human Resources office for review and to effect the promotion. For GS-15 (or ZP-V) promotions, however, an additional and significant step is required. These promotions must be evaluated by a national board of NMFS senior scientists, with the final decision resting with the AA for Fisheries.

The Center’s PMAC is responsible for other personnel recommendations, as well, including employee training decisions, awards, etc. as requested by the Center Director. The Committee consists of one higher level scientist or manager from each laboratory/division, and is chaired by the Deputy Science Director. With respect to promotions, PMAC’s primary role is to assure fairness and comparability throughout the Center. For example, PMAC is responsible for ensuring that persons with a research grade or accretion of duties promotion throughout the Center are held to equivalent standards, and may consult with an outside expert or experts in areas requiring specialized input. PMAC reviews all promotions to the GS-12 or ZP-IV level and above. The Committee strives to meet twice a year, generally in the Spring (April-May) and Autumn (October-November). Promotion packages are submitted about six weeks in advance of the meeting dates, so that Factor IV members have ample time to formulate recommendations. Requirements for research grade promotions are governed by the Office of Personnel management’s Research Grade Evaluation Guide (RGEG), which defines the basic factors for

evaluation. Your supervisor should be able to provide additional guidance concerning specific information and formats required to prepare a promotion package.

In cases where supervisor and employee disagree about the appropriateness or timing of a research grade or accretion of duties promotion, the employee may bring the issue to the next higher level supervisor, and ultimately to me. In such cases, I usually would seek advice from PMAC before reaching a decision about whether or not to proceed.